



GENTRIFICATION

A big concern for collective houses starting up in urban areas is the role they may come to play in the process of gentrification. If those starting up such a project are not part of the community in which they chose to locate their efforts, they may run the risk of helping to change historically low-income, culturally diverse or blue-collar, working-class neighborhoods by advancing the negative effects of gentrification. It is important to be conscious of this possibility and work against being agents seeking sustainable change based on equality and liberation while unwittingly falling in line with the logic of gentrifying process.

While changes in any community can be a good thing and the cleaning up and better maintenance of a community would be surely welcomed by residents, gentrification makes these changes for others to take the place of existing community residents. Gentrification is not just a change in the aesthetics and appearance of a neighborhood but a change in the social relations of a community internally as well as externally with people and institutions in the socio, political and economic centers of power. Consequently, a fight against gentrification is not just an effort to keep the status quo in a community but to maintain the internal social relations while attempting to move the community's external relations to socio, political and economic centers of power from the margins to the center.

As mentioned in the zine, many activists/organizers seeking to engage in such a form of agency as housing collectives are susceptible to becoming the first wave of gentrification in areas under threat. This can happen due to much of the groups' demographics having beliefs and practices which follow or create an artistic, outsider, community-from-the-margins aesthetic that tends to attract new money and those with white-collar jobs looking to live in areas containing the physical manifestation of that energy and sub cultural vibe. With this knowledge in mind, trying to engage in conscious behavior that seeks to counter any potential negative effects from a housing collective's presence is an important form of agency in which to critically engage. Such a critical engagement would seek to strategize tactics and general behaviors towards achieving goals that are shared with many of the intergenerational residents regarding this issue. The strategy and tactics can be regularly assessed and critically examined with existing residents as to how effective they are in achieving the shared goals.

This can and must be done if the neighborhood is under threat of gentrification and the goal is coherent sustainability in theory and practice around issues of race, class, sex, gender, sexuality, ability and the environment. Further, attempting to engage in such efforts alone is to make such efforts in a non-horizontal way that lends itself to a more vanguardist approach. With such an approach, the intergenerational population of the community will morethanlikely view the intentional community as outsiders and the efforts of those living there as not being in solidarity with their needs, individually or with the community at large. If this were to happen, the isolation of the intentional community within the broader community would likely render all other efforts of such a transgressing collective intentional community project inert. Thus, for other efforts and goals to be successfully achieved, collective projects engaged in liberatory practice need to be in dialog with the intergenerational population of the neighborhood in which they exist.



Often for people new to a neighborhood to be an asset in the struggle against gentrifying forces, they need to have knowledge of the social fabric and history of the community. One of the most important ways to acquire this knowledge and plug into that social fabric is to create authentic space and opportunities to engage with those you live amongst for dialog on these and other issues. It is important to do this with an eye on the difference between contrived engagement and intentional practice as the goal is not to convince people that the intentional community really is what it would like to be but that the intentional community is being understood as authentically portraying who they are. The former engages people as a means-to-an-end leaving something unequal in the engagement. The later engages people where they are at from where you are at, and the engagement is the end-in-itself, leaving a more horizontal and authentic interaction. The later is important for setting relations on a trajectory that may potentially foster greater collaborative process in any struggles facing the community in the future.

All of these are aspects of activist collectives to be mindful of and to potentially engage in while a collective house finds its presence in the context of a community's existential struggle for its contemporary social, cultural and economic relations. However, as mentioned in the zine, there are no clear certainties in the potential practices of an outsider housing collective once a decision is made to locate in a neighborhood under threat of gentrification. Some would say the best that can be done by people outside a community in struggle against gentrification is to ethically choose not to move there. This is especially true if you fit a demographic that facilitates the first wave of gentrification because even if your intentions are good and your practice is sound, there are limitations to engaging in this kind of theory and practice. It is the case that a neighborhood filled with allied houses in solidarity can also be a problem for communities fighting displacement. Playing this out a bit, a neighborhood that is completely made up of radically active and politically conscious collective houses aware of issues of gentrification is still a totally gentrified neighborhood. Though the argument for never moving to a community under threat of gentrification should be taken seriously, if there can be tactics to use in solidarity with these communities, then it seems plausible that aiding a community with which you are a part of can be potentially beneficial to the community at large, provided a coherent theory and practice exists among collective members. Solidarity as a concept can transgress recognized boundaries of race, class, gender, sex, etc. in political agency and can potentially provide a more unified front of practice against the power of White-Supremacist-Capitalist-Patriarchy in the process of gentrification. Whatever people decide in these circumstances, it is important to understand the layered dimensions of the issue of gentrification and to make the best choices possible given the available knowledge about the situation in which people find themselves.

In the day to day context, there is much to be gained for building strong connections with others in the community while maintaining commitment to a radical theory and practice. Many of the typical neighborly engagements are common sense like saying hello or lending a cup of sugar. But there are several other ways to intentionally engage with a housing collective's community that can keep collective members aware of the conscious resistance to efforts of gentrification. Again, listed here are some day to day chosen practices in our interactions with fellow residents in our community:

- Attempting to greet our neighbors in a manner that invited them into our open space quickly after moving in.



- Not letting our personal or collective politics be the only arbiter of what we chose to do in a given situation that seemed to call for action.
- Seeing how people we began to share community with thought about and responded to various situations and following their example, as opposed to only relying on our own political views..
- Inviting neighbors to events that took place at our living space.
- Getting formally involved with some of the local political and community-based institutions.
- Not calling the police for any reasons other than personal matters (i.e., a stolen car or direct, personal harm).
- Engaging in cop watch when the police were out in force in our vicinity.
- Lending resource support to our neighbors as we would support personal friends and fellow comrades as a means of including them in an open sharing of intentional community space.
- Not removing graffiti and observing and following the lead of those who have lived in the neighborhood and understand the history, context and meaning of the tagging.
- Attempting to have our collective membership reflect a similar racial and cultural symmetry to the neighborhood the Ant Hill existed in.
- Attempting to set the aesthetic of our collective space as resistance and DIY as opposed to existence and Hipster-fi.

Again, these practices were by no means perfect, and we often felt they were not enough alone in the grand scheme of things. But those feelings were only accompanied by the added frustration many feel when resisting gentrification in urban centers, where the roots of the problem are a microcosm of the intersection of oppressive forces in late capitalism. We believe any real solutions must be multifaceted in scope and successfully revolutionary in practice, whether something as simple as rent control or more complex like putting limitations on private capital and a need to control local, regional and State governance to help do either.

More information on strategies and tactics can be found at the links below:

<http://mountpleasant.mysite.com/blank.html>

<http://www.radstats.org.uk/no069/article2.htm>

The zine and appendix can be found online at anthillzine.wordpress.com.